

PILOT BOAT *PEACOCK*
Columbia River Maritime Museum
Astoria
Clatsop County
Oregon

HAER OR-178
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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
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PILOT BOAT *PEACOCK*

HAER No. OR-178

Location: Columbia River Maritime Museum, Astoria, Clatsop County, Oregon

Type of Craft: Pilot boat

Dates of Construction: 1964; delivered-1967

Original Owner: Columbia River Bar Pilots Association

Present Owner: Columbia River Maritime Museum

Disposition: Museum exhibit

Significance: Pilot Boat *Peacock* is significant for its role in guiding ships safely through the dangerous Columbia River Bar for more than thirty years. The design incorporated a 23' "daughter" boat that could be deployed in exceptionally treacherous conditions.

Project Information: This project is part of the Historic American Engineering Record (HAER), a long-range program to document historically significant engineering and industrial works in the United States. The Heritage Documentation Programs of the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, administers the HAER program. Todd Croteau, HAER Maritime Program Coordinator, produced the large-format photographs, and Justine Christianson, HAER Historian, compiled the report in 2012.

Description: Pilot Boat *Peacock* was custom-built in Germany using a design based on North Sea rescue boats. The welded-steel ship is self-righting and measures 90' long and 33' tall, with a maximum speed of 26 knots/hour. For maximum power and maneuverability in extreme surf conditions, the ship was equipped with triple screws and rudder. *Peacock* could accommodate a three-man crew, as well as up to twelve bar pilots. The stern features a hinged opening for deploying the 23' steel-hulled "daughter" boat used to transport the pilot in particularly hazardous

conditions to the vessel needing guidance through the Columbia River Bar.¹

History:

Pilot boats were necessary at the mouth of the Columbia River where it opened to the Pacific Ocean because of the high surf and treacherous sand bars; currently, ships navigating the Columbia River Bar are mandated to use licensed pilots. Capt. James McAvoy likened the point where the 1,214-mile Columbia River met the sea to “two giant hammers pounding each other.” On occasion, swells can be greater than 40' although sailors have reported them in excess of 65' to 70'. In addition, sand and silt are deposited at the river's mouth. Ocean tides then push the material around and create sand bars that further complicate navigation. Lt. Michael Monteith of the Coast Guard stated “there are more treacherous river bars in the world, but no place that requires so much skill to get through.”² As a result, the Columbia River Bar Pilots Association was formed in 1846 to guide ships through this area, known as the “Graveyard of the Pacific.” Originally, pilot boats would come alongside the ship needing guidance, and the pilot would climb up a ladder onto the ship. He would then navigate the ship through the river bar. *Peacock* revolutionized the operation because it was motorized and because of its daughter boat, which allowed traffic to continue through the Columbia River Bar for a greater portion of the year despite surf conditions. *Peacock* was decommissioned in 1999 after the introduction of integrated helicopter/pilot boat systems (*Chinook* and *Columbia*). The ship is now on display at the Columbia River Maritime Museum.³

Sources:

Egan, Timothy. “Where a River and the Sea Eat Ships.” *New York Times*, February 26, 1988, p. A10.

Hillinger, Charles. “Columbia River Inlet a Graveyard for 2,000 Vessels.” *Los Angeles Times*, November 2, 1969, p. B.

“Pilot Boat *Peacock*.” Columbia River Maritime Museum website, http://www.crmn.org/maritimemuseum_collection_peacock.html, accessed May 2012.

¹ Description based on Pilot Boat *Peacock*,” Columbia River Maritime Museum website, http://www.crmn.org/maritimemuseum_collection_peacock.html, accessed May 2012.

² Quotes from Timothy Egan, “Where River and the Sea Eat Ships,” *New York Times*, February 26, 1988, p. A10.

³ “Pilot Boat *Peacock*,” Columbia River Maritime Museum website; Charles Hillinger, “Columbia River Inlet a Graveyard for 2,000 Vessels,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 2, 1969, p. B; Timothy Egan, “Where a River and the Sea Eat Ships,” *New York Times*, February 26, 1988, p. A10; Wallace Turner, “Oregon's Bar Pilots Link River and Ocean Traffic,” *New York Times*, March 1, 1981, p. 50; Shane Powell, “Elite Pilots Guide Ships over Perilous Bar,” *Daily Astorian*, March 27, 2002, http://www.columbiariverbarpilots.com/columbiariverbarpilots_press_0203.html, accessed June 2012.

Powell, Shane. "Elite Pilots Guide Ships Over Perilous Bar." *Daily Astorian*, March 27, 2002, http://www.columbiariverbarpilots.com/columbiariverbarpilots_press_0203.html, accessed June 2012.

Turner, Wallace. "Oregon's Bar Pilots Link River and Ocean Traffic." *New York Times*, March 1, 1981, p. 50.